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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HAVANA 000053

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STATE DEPT FOR WHA/CCA

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [CU](#)

SUBJECT: YOUNG CUBAN ACTIVISTS CONSIDER HOLDING ANOTHER  
FORUM

REF: 06 HAVANA 23546

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Classified By: COM Michael Parmly for Reason 1.4(d).

11. (C) Summary: Leaders of three influential Cuban opposition youth groups met on January 17 and warmed to the idea of holding an ambitious youth forum, possibly in March. The prospective gathering would bring together perhaps 300 youth activists from across the island. The three leaders -- Nestor Rodriguez Lobaina, Edgard Lopez Moreno and Ahmed Rodriguez Albacia -- organized the November 24 youth meeting (reftel) that drew 63 young activists, two of them from Mexico. The three also told us that the Cuban Government has stepped up its harassment of young dissidents, detaining some, threatening others and firing at least one activist from his job. They said more uniformed police are on the streets and are carrying out more ID checks. Frustration is palpable among Cuban youth. End Summary.

12. (C) Rodriguez Lobaina of the Young Cubans' Movement for Democracy, Lopez Moreno of the Marti Youth Coalition and Rodriguez Albacia of Young People Without Censorship held talks on January 17, meeting for the first time since a November 24 forum united dozens of young activists. The three told Poloff that it would be difficult, but not impossible, to hold an event that would attract around 300 young activists from all parts of the country. They said they would need financial support to pay for the participants' travel and food, adding that the GOC would do all in its power to prevent another forum. They argued that young Cubans want freedom and political change, but fear they would be arrested for making any such public demand.

REPRESSIVE ACTS

13. (C) Since November 24, they said, dozens of participants in the youth forum, as well as other members of the three groups, have been detained, interrogated, threatened or issued citations to appear before police. (Minimal violence has been reported in connection with this crackdown, although a 20-year-old activist of the Cuban Human Rights Foundation, Luis Esteban Espinosa, said a police officer punched him four or five times on January 12 at a police station in Ciego de Avila.) Rodriguez Lobaina, a former political prisoner, said 11 members of his group have been subjected at least one repressive measure since November 24. He added that the GOC fired Alexei Escudo Fernandez as a restaurant administrator

in Havana, and forced Gerardo Sanchez Ortejas and his wife to appear before police in Santiago three times. Lopez Moreno said the GOC has taken repressive action against at least a dozen Coalition members since the forum, and that the wave of repression is increasing, with four Coalition members summoned between January 12 and 16. Most of the young activists who were detained were held only for brief periods, although Rodriguez Albacia spent a week behind bars in early January. On January 16, according to independent journalist Guillermo Farinas, the GOC detained 24-year-old activist Yancy Ruiz Martin, who faces a potential charge of "dangerousness."

#### ANOTHER EVENT POSSIBLE

¶4. (C) The three opposition-group leaders did not discuss a venue for a future forum, but expressed agreement that it should be held in Havana. Rodriguez Albacia said young activists have reached a historical crossroads, but that it would be dangerous to underestimate the power and reach of State Security. Lopez Moreno, who faces a possible espionage charge, said any future forum should embrace "new language" aimed at lowering the level of confrontation with the regime.

#### COMMENT

¶5. (C) Frustration is palpable among Cuba's youth, who tend to interpret the GOC's signs that "A Better World Is Possible" as "Anywhere Other Than In Cuba." Young Cubans are bored with incessant propaganda, starved of recreational activities, comfortably numbed by cheap alcohol, and aware that the career paths offered by the current system lead nowhere. Relatively few Cuban youngsters cross the Rubicon

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into formal opposition, but the regime, as seen by its continuing and intensifying crackdown, realizes that the country's many disaffected young people could become a leading force for change. For that reason, we do not expect any letup in the repression of young Cuban activists.  
PARMLY